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SOME PROBLEMS OF THE EVENING SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

The evening school represents one of the most worth-while phases of the movement for the wider use of the school plant. This follows from the fact that the more hours the school building and equipment are used for actual school purposes, the greater the returns on the investment. Though the evening school is not a new feature of public-school activity, there seems to be little knowledge of this phase of public education among the people generally. And, judging from the lack of literature on the subject, the educators themselves have certainly not given it much attention.

Two facts probably explain this. In the first place, the evening school is peculiarly a city problem, since such schools are rarely maintained in towns of less than 8,000 to 10,000 population. The problems in each city are to a great extent peculiar to that city, and hence each works out its own plan independently. Further, there has been and still is too much of a feeling that the evening school is simply the day school prolonged for two hours in the evening. So the problems of the evening school are thought to be the same as those of the day school and to need no particular attention. As to the first point, it may be said that evening schools are coming to be maintained in smaller cities and towns and even in rural districts; and it will be recognized more and more that many of the problems pertaining to evening-school as well as to city-school administration in general are common to all communities. The second point suggests a conclusion based upon a false assumption. The evening school is not the day school in evening hours. Many of the problems of administration and of materials and methods of instruction are distinctly those of the evening school, and hence need to be recognized and treated as such. It is the purpose of

this paper to present some facts and figures which may be of value in the solution of these problems.

HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

According to Dexter, "the beginning of the public evening-school movement of the present day, which has spread to every part of the country, . . . was at Louisville, Ky."¹ This was in 1834. In 1868 Henry Barnard made the following statement:

Evening or night schools in elementary branches for pupils over fifteen years of age, and in several cities under special conditions to be determined by the school board for pupils under fifteen, are provided as a part of the system of public instruction in Chicago, Brooklyn, New York, Lowell, Newark, New Orleans, Providence, Salem, San Francisco, and St. Louis.²

Dexter points out that previous to this time evening schools were in operation in Worcester, Mass., in 1848; Scranton, Pa., in 1866; Philadelphia and Cambridge in 1868.³

In the report of the United States commissioner of education for 1880 is the following statement:

It may be said that evening schools have become a permanent feature of city school systems. It is true that they are not maintained in all even of the principal cities and in some cities in which they have been established they are regarded as of doubtful advantage; but a careful study of their history for successive years warrants the conclusion that where they have failed of good results they have been poorly conducted or not adapted to local conditions.

In 1881 evening schools were reported in thirty-two cities. In 1888, of the 684 cities from which returns were received by the commissioner of education, 148 reported evening schools.

Table I, made from data in the reports of the commissioner of education, indicates the increase in the number of cities having evening schools and the number of pupils enrolled. It shows a fairly steady growth in the last decade in those two respects. There was a slight decrease in 1909-10. The additional decrease in 1911-12 is probably to be explained by the fact that reports were received only from cities of 10,000 inhabitants and over, while in previous years 8,000 was the minimum. These figures

¹ *History of Education in the United States*, p. 541.

² *Barnard's American Journal*, XIX, 439.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 542.

TABLE I

	1902-3	1903-4	Percentage of Increase	1904-5	Percentage of Increase	1905-6	Percentage of Increase	1906-7	Percentage of Increase
Number of cities reporting...	158	178	12.7	180	1.12	203	12.83	107	2.95*
Number of pupils.....	229,099	270,692	18.2	292,319	7.98	314,004	7.62	315,093	0.16
Average daily attendance...	93,915	106,983	13.9	107,375	0.04	128,955	20.10	135,393	4.99
Ratio of average attendance to enrolment.....	40.99	39.52	3.42*	36.73	7.08*	40.99	11.69	42.97	4.83

	1907-8	Percentage of Increase	1908-9	Percentage of Increase	1909-10	Percentage of Increase	1911-12	Percentage of Increase
Number of cities reporting...	229	16.24	233	1.75	227*	2.57	205	9.69*
Number of pupils.....	357,923	1.36	379,952	5.90	374,364	1.24	419,981	12.18
Average daily attendance...	144,579	6.78	155,888	7.82	145,193	6.86	149,416	2.90
Ratio of average attendance to enrolment.....	40.39	6.00*	41.13	1.83	38.77	5.73	35.57	8.22*

* Decrease

do not show the rapid increase in the number enrolled in a few cities in recent years. For example: Cleveland had 1,265 enrolled in 1902-3 and 10,238 in 1911-12. Everett, Mass., shows an increase from 484 in 1909-10 to 772 in 1911-12. In Newark, N.J., between 1902 and 1912 the increase was over 263 per cent, and the gain during the year 1911-12 was almost as great as that made in the 11 years preceding 1902. In 1911-12 there was an enrolment of 2,494 in Grand Rapids, an increase of 35 per cent over the year before. Memphis had only 115 enrolled in 1909-10 and in 1911-12 had 423.

PROBLEMS

Table I shows that the ratio of average attendance to enrolment has decreased from 40.9 in 1902-3 to 35.57 in 1911-12. As further evidence that regularity of attendance measured in this way is no greater than it was a generation ago we find that in sixteen leading cities the ratio of average attendance to total enrolment in 1887-88 was 38.83 while that for 1911-12 was 37.54. This matter of regularity of attendance has been considered from the first to be the big problem of the evening-school management. New York City reported in 1870 that nearly one-third of the pupils enrolled in the evening schools left in less than one month and only 42 per cent continued to the close of the term. The state school commissioner of Rhode Island reported in 1888-89 that "the actual attendance in evening schools for this last year has been only 35.5 per cent of the enrolment, a little more than half of the percentage in day schools."¹ In 1888-89 the United States commissioner attempted "to secure whatever exact data were available in relation to falling off in attendance which is a source of complaint in so many cities." From the data he obtained he concluded that the chief points in which the evening schools need strengthening are: more efficient teachers, a well-defined course of study and careful classification, and a longer term.

It may be inferred, from the fact that the percentage of attendance is no higher than a generation ago, that there has been no improvement in the conduct of evening schools along the lines

¹ *Report of U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1888-89.*

thought by the commissioner to most need attention. While there does seem to be too much basis for this conclusion, judging from the methods and lack of method still prevailing to a great extent, yet the conclusion is not altogether sound. The reasoning goes upon the assumption that a high percentage of attendance in evening schools is attainable. And it is of course assumed without question that it is desirable. The writer believes the first is a false assumption, and the second deserves some attention.

We must bear in mind that the evening school of the present is primarily for the adult, and that of the future will be even more distinctively so. So far as the evening school applies to boys and girls under sixteen, it is really a continuation school. And with the development of regular day continuation schools the need for the evening school for this class will cease to exist. And this is certainly as it should be. The superintendent of schools of Rochester, in commenting on the failure to enforce the compulsory law which provides that all boys under sixteen years of age who are at work and have not completed a grammar-school course shall attend evening school six hours a week, says in explanation that though defects in the wording of the law prevented enforcement, yet "even more serious is the basal supposition that boys who have performed manual labor for eight to ten hours a day are in a proper condition to profit by evening instruction." The compulsory evening schools for boys and girls under sixteen is, therefore, a temporary thing, which must give place to the day continuation school. But the evening school for the adult is here to stay. It is to be noted that at present attendance for by far the greater number is not compulsory; and this number is steadily growing larger. This is significant in considering regularity of attendance. For, granting the very best of motives on the part of the pupils, yet it is a matter of individual judgment as to which will yield the greater returns; for example, the two hours at the school or the evening at the lodge meeting, at home resting or doing some much-needed work.

But granting the desire on the part of the individual to be present a given evening, what are some of the conditions tending to make this frequently impossible? The kind of employment of the pupils represents one of the most common difficulties in the

way of regular attendance. The following are actual cases which came within the experience of one evening-school teacher with a small class:

1. A plumber found it impossible to come when his work took him to a distant part of the city.

2. A laborer found work in a brickyard too far distant to permit him to come regularly.

3. A street-car motorman whose schedule had brought him to "the barn" at 6:40 was put on a schedule which brought him in at 7:40. He came to school for a while even though an hour late. However, he finally gave it up because of his lateness and sickness in the family. Much to the surprise of the teacher he returned the very next session, saying that he had his old schedule and that the sick child was much improved.

4. A grocer's clerk frequently could not get through with his work in time to come.

5. A pharmacist, a Hungarian trained in the gymnasium and university of his home country, could come only alternate weeks, because of his working schedule. Aside from the matter in question, but illustrating the interest and seriousness of purpose of foreigners learning English, it may be worth while to add that this man came alternate weeks a distance that required a car ride of over an hour for individual instruction; and later at even greater sacrifice took up work at a university in the city preparatory to setting up as an assayer.

6. A waitress came when the hours of her work, frequently changed, made it possible for her to come.

The foregoing instances indicate something of the impossibility of securing a high percentage of attendance when this is computed as the ratio of average attendance to average number belonging. And if the percentage of attendance is computed as the ratio of average attendance to total enrolment, as is the case with the figures given, there is much more to explain the comparatively low percentage.

Many men temporarily out of employment come in until they find employment again. For example, in the class mentioned above there were two Norwegian fishermen who came regularly and on time. A young woman who kept a rooming-house found it necessary to stay at home in the evenings to meet prospective roomers, especially because, on account of regrading, her house had become less desirable as a rooming-place. The fact is that many who begin early in the year and attend regularly drop out,

some soon, others later, for reasons altogether beyond the control of the school. Many more examples might be given. But from what has been said it seems a fair conclusion that a high percentage of attendance based on the ratio of average attendance to total enrolment is altogether out of the question, and even if computed as the ratio of average attendance to average number belonging, it is unreasonable to expect a high percentage as compared with the day school.

The writer believes that in the light of the foregoing conclusions too much effort and attention are given to securing and maintaining a high percentage of attendance at the expense of other matters more worthy of the attention of those in charge of evening schools. The teacher has been held too much responsible for a condition beyond his control. Feeling that he will be rated according to the way his attendance keeps up and that his very continuance in the work depends upon his holding the class, he may be expected to yield to the temptation to use schemes and devices to accomplish this end even at the cost of real instruction. If the greatest possible care is given to the matter of the selection of teachers, it seems that less emphasis might be placed on the mere matter of keeping up attendance and more to helping solve the problems of the classroom. As long ago as 1887-88 the United States commissioner of education said:

The conditions that tend to irregularity cannot be removed by the most competent instructors or by the most careful attention to the comfort of the pupils, and it seems to be certain that a high standard of attendance is unattainable in ordinary evening schools open to all applicants, except possibly by the strict enforcement of some law similar to that in force in Massachusetts.

Mention should be made of two features which have very generally resulted in greater regularity of attendance: (1) Pupils are not considered enrolled until they have attended a minimum number of evenings, preferably three. (2) A deposit is required on enrolment. This is in most cities \$1.00 and is remitted if certain conditions are met. The Boston plan, which has brought very good results, is as follows: The fee is refunded the last week on attendance at two-thirds of the sessions or three-fourths of the sessions after January 1. This latter provision, not found any-

where else by the writer, wisely recognizes regularity after late enrolment.

One of the real problems for those in charge of evening schools is the selection of teachers. Again the conditions in the evening schools make this a problem different from that of the day schools. As at present conducted this work does not require the entire time of a teacher. So it is done as something additional to the work of the day and really incidental to it, either by the regular teachers or by others who are otherwise engaged during the day, frequently students attending higher educational institutions. It is the exceptional teacher who can do good work in the evening after a full day, no matter how much devoted to the cause. Many, attracted by the opportunity to increase their meager salaries, force themselves to the work, which can hardly be other than lifeless and inefficient under such conditions. Boston tries to guard against too great overwork on the part of teachers by requiring that no day-school teacher may teach more than 300 nights in five years. Thus a teacher may not serve more than three years in succession of 100 nights each.

It needs no argument that those people, young and old, native and foreign, who make the necessary effort to attend evening school should have the best teachers that can be obtained and should have these teachers at their best and not at the end of a day's work. That even the first of these points is just coming to be recognized is indicated by the following statement in the 1913 report of the superintendent of the Boston schools:

The instruction in the evening schools has to a great extent been given by candidates for appointment in day schools. Many of these have little or no teaching experience. As night-school teaching is much more difficult than day teaching, it does not seem fair to use maturer night students for the training of young teachers. Therefore, the rule has now been changed, making day-school teachers eligible for evening-school employment after they have passed their first promotional examination. . . . A course of training for the teaching of foreigners and for other night teaching has been given this fall with great benefit to a group of young aspirants for teaching positions.

The matter of providing regular teachers for the evening-school work seems hardly to have been given a thought. One

principal who has had considerable experience in the management of a large evening school suggests that the session begin at the close of the regular day session, say at three o'clock, and continue until nine, with a short intermission for lunch. This would make possible the employment of an extra corps of teachers, who would be especially prepared to do evening-school work and would give all their time to it. This very fact would, of course, constitute the objection in the minds of many people who look upon any additional outlay as an expenditure and not as an investment. The cost of the educational plant and the value of the output ought to warrant the employment of two shifts of workmen. These conditions, together with the demand for the product, justify such practice in the industrial world. Why not in the educational? If there is any doubt as to the returns on the investment, statements such as the following, many of which might be cited, ought to be convincing: "No money is spent by this Board of Education which gives greater value received than does that expended on evening schools."¹

The phase of evening-school work perhaps most in need of careful study is the instruction in English for foreigners, because of the great possibilities for good service, the large numbers of this class enrolled, and because of the fact that this work is so different from any done in the day schools. Not only the coast cities but inland cities as well have a large percentage of non-English-speaking people enrolled in the evening schools. Nearly half of those enrolled in Passaic, N.J., are of this class. In St. Louis about one-third are foreign-born; in Erie a majority. Detroit reports that the increase in the number of foreigners is beyond that in any other department. The problem will have increasing importance for the Pacific Coast cities after the expected influx of foreigners through the Panama Canal. The significance of the work with foreigners is indicated by the following statement of the school committee of Cambridge in the 1911-12 report:

These people must be educated—in a new sense of the word. They cannot be reached by our day schools. They must be induced to come to our evening schools. If Cambridge can bring this to pass in the next five years it will have

¹ *Report of the Superintendent, Nashua, N.H., 1912.*

succeeded in accomplishing an educational task second in importance to none that might be attempted.

While the work with foreigners is primarily for the purpose of giving them a working knowledge of the English language, it also offers the great opportunity for training in citizenship. Here is a chance for the teacher such as he seldom has. A specific aim, clear to pupils and teacher, interest and motive with consequent eager application, are present as with no other class of pupils. The responsibility is great upon the school to bring the proper materials and methods to bear. The most essential thing here is a recognition of the fact that these people are adults in years and in their thinking. They are not children and must not be treated as such. The following statement in the report of the superintendent of the St. Louis schools, while encouraging for the future, yet indicates how little attention has been given to this important matter:

The instruction of this large number of foreign-born pupils [2,745 in 1911-12] is a work requiring skill and method. It would seem wise for those instructing classes to assemble several times a year for the purpose of discussing and demonstrating the best methods of instruction.

As to materials, the work calls for two kinds: conversational exercises which shall be immediately useful in the shop, on the street, and in the home; and reading matter which shall be simple in form, and in content such as to be informational to adults. To have these grown-ups read the ordinary school primer as an introduction to the English language is ridiculous. Very little has been done to meet this urgent need for suitable reading material. The following excerpt from the 1911-12 report of the superintendent of schools of Newark, one of the first cities to establish evening schools and most progressive in their management, is significant:

We have been considerably handicapped in past years in finding suitable reading material for foreign classes. The books supplied to the children in the day schools are not as a rule well adapted for adult pupils who are just beginning to read. The material is childish and the vocabulary not what adults most need. A liberal supply of specially adapted reading matter is being gradually procured.

It is hoped that this material will be made available for teachers in other cities.